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House Group Moving To Probe Birch Society

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Chairman Walter of the House Un-American Activities Committee said today he has ordered a preliminary investigation of the activities of the John Birch Society, the controversial anti-Communist organization.

The investigation was requested earlier today by Representative Hiestand, Republican of California, a member of the society. Mr. Hiestand said he was sure an honest inquiry would dispel charges that the society is a "dictatorial, Fascist" organization.

Mr. Walter said the purpose of the preliminary investigation was to determine whether his committee has jurisdiction. Noting that its legislative charter limits its inquiries to the diffusion of propaganda attacking the principle or form of the United States Government, Mr. Walter said, "I don't see from the press reports anything this society has done that would bring it within the purview of the committee."

Reuss Backs Inquiry

Representative Reuss, Democrat of Wisconsin, said today he also has requested an investigation as a result of numerous letters he said he received attacking Chief Justice Warren.

He reported that many of the letters were mimeographed and followed the same general line but usually did not identify the writers as members of the John Birch Society.

In a letter to Chairman Walter, Mr. Reuss said he believes the letters he has received originated with the society. He said propaganda organizations have



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a right to express their opinions, but that in this instance there should be an investigation to determine "who is behind these activities, how they are financed and how they are carried on."

Mr. Hiestand became the first member of Congress to disclose his membership in the semi-secret society today when he was asked about a letter he sent a number of fellow Congressmen yesterday, urging them to make no attack on the society "until you know the facts."

Mr. Hiestand told an interviewer he had joined the group in California "quite a while back." He said, "I'm quite sure there are other members of Congress who are also members of the society." But he said he believed each should have the right to decide for himself whether to reveal his membership.

The Congressman said he was prompted to send his cautionary note to his colleagues yesterday because "a member of the other body (the Senate) has been putting a lot of stuff in the Congressional Record that is simply not accurate."

Mr. Hiestand declined to identify the Senator of whom he spoke. Senator Milton E. Young, Republican of North Dakota, said today he was speaking in the Senate against the Birch Society.

...the society was dangerous to democracy because it condoned semi-secret operations and harassment tactics against public officials and private citizens with whose views it disagreed.

Mr. Hiestand said he thought an investigation of the Birch Society by the House committee would put these charges to rest. He confirmed that members of the society have engaged in letter writing campaigns to Congress and to other public officials, but denied that the society condones secret pressure tactics.

The Californian blamed the charges on an inaccurate story that first appeared in what he called a "California Communist publication" and said members of Congress should beware of echoing accusations whose origin they do not understand.

Won't Take Fifth

Mr. Hiestand said he was sure that if members of the Birch Society are called before a congressional committee "none of them will take the Fifth Amendment. I know these birds pretty well and they're rugged individualists, intensely anti-Communist and intensely patriotic. It would be a good thing to hear their story from the members themselves."

Mr. Hiestand said that no individual in the society is obliged to carry out any activities that violate his own conscience. "I don't indorse absolutely everything the society stands for," he said, "but the big 98 per cent of its program is intense patriotism and anti-Communism."

As for the charges against Mr. Eisenhower and other high Republican officials, Mr. Hiestand said, "some of these were taken out of context. They were made by the founder (Mr. Welch) some years ago, before the society was founded, in a circular letter that was not for general distribution and was supposed to be confidential."

He said they were being dredged up now in an effort to destroy the organization in public opinion. "When an anti-Communist group begins to disintegrate," Mr. Hiestand said, "it is often a sign of its strength."

Senator Young said today he was drawn by the statements Mr. Hiestand made about the society. He said that the documents he

of the most responsible and some cases, most conservative newspapers in the country.

As for the proposed investigation, Senator Young said he haven't suggested it and doubt that I will, but it's something the Democratic leadership should consider in view of the great public interest and concern with this group.

Representative Ull, another conservative Republican from California, said in an interview today that he will continue to have serious reservations about the Birch Society as long as Mr. Welch is connected with it.

Mr. Ull said the organization has some strong chapters in his district, whose members have energetically opposed communism and what they regard as dangerous and wasteful economic projects in the State community.

Wrote to Welch

Declaring that he was a member of the society and one of no others in Congress except Mr. Hiestand, Mr. Ull closed that within the last few days he wrote to Mr. Welch, another society member to join them against letting the organization "become a Gerald L. K. Smith outfit."

He added, however, that society members in his district were "all reputable and some of whom have supported me in the past." Mr. Ull said he differed with Chief Justice Warren and other Supreme Court members on many issues but thought it was "futile" to urge impeachment of the Chief Justice.

The John Birch Society, founded by Mr. Welch in 1958 as an organization to combat Communist subversion in the United States, it took its name from a 27-year-old British missionary from Georgia who was an Army intelligence officer in the Far East during World War II and was killed by the Chinese Communists days after V-J Day.

The organization functioned in near secrecy for a year, recently it has been the subject of criticism from some new papers and some who say it is a "fascist" organization. It has been accused of being a "fascist" organization.

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